

The St. Lawrence County Historical Association

QUARTERLY

Volume LIII

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2008



Dwight Church

The Flying Photographer and His Real Photo Postcards

The St. Lawrence County Historical Association at the Silas Wright House

The St. Lawrence County Historical Association is a private, non-profit, membership organization based at the Silas Wright House in Canton, New York. Founded in 1947, the Association is governed by a constitution, by-laws, and Board of Trustees. The Historical Association's membership meets annually to elect its trustees.

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The SLCHA Quarterly welcomes contributions. To submit a manuscript, or for further information, please contact the editor through the St. Lawrence County Historical Association. Please address communications to: Managing Editor, *The SLCHA Quarterly*, P.O. Box 8, Canton, NY 13617.

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Roger Bailey

On the Cover

*Dwight Church adjusting his 8x10-inch Eastman Home Portrait
Camera from a ladder fixed atop his Hupmobile sedan, ca 1927.
Courtesy SLCHA.*

From the County Historian

By Trent Trulock

I recently travelled out of town and did something that I normally do when I travel, I bought postcards. I buy postcards for two reasons, to use them for mailing and to have images of places I've visited. I usually take photographs when I travel, but I have found over the years that if I want a nice picture of the place I'm visiting I need to buy postcards. I do this without much thought when I travel, but I was reminded of my habit by Roger Bailey's article on the real photo postcards of Dwight Church.

Postcards have multiple uses, such as written communication and souvenirs (my main personal uses), historical documentation, collectability, artwork, imaginings of an ideal world or setting and an emotional connection to a person, place, thing or idea. Just as postcards have multiple uses they can also teach us multiple things. We can learn about a person, place, thing, ethnic group, geographic region, holiday, art or idea. The image from a postcard can inform us about architecture, fashion, fads, automobiles, people or what was considered important, interesting, unique, unusual or beautiful at the time the postcard was manufactured. If postcards were mailed we can learn about genealogy, family history and local history by gleaning information on who received the postcard, where it was postmarked, how much postage was used, who mailed it and what was written on it. Even the technical aspects of printing the postcard, such as the type of paper used and how the postcard is laid out can tell you what time period it may have been produced. I recently learned that in the early days of postcards you had to write on the front of the postcard because the back was



The Silas Wright House, home of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association.

reserved only for the address and the postage. It is interesting to me that so much can be discovered from such an ephemeral piece of material culture. I imagine that in the past people bought and mailed postcards just as I do, without any thought that they could be used to document history in the future.

The SLCHA's postcard collection presently consists of eight archival albums organized by town, village and hamlet and includes postcards of buildings, people, landscapes and street scenes. The collection contains black and white, sepia tone, colorized and colored postcards. Some are real photo postcards (this term is explained in the Dwight Church article in this issue). The SLCHA also has three 6" x 12" boxes of postcards that remind me of greeting cards. They cover such topics as weddings, regrets, illness, birthdays, holidays, "why don't you write," new babies, scenic views and World War I. Some of the postcards in the SLCHA collection are humorous, while others give a snapshot in time, freezing the moment of some event such as the construction of the St. Lawrence Seaway and Moses-Saunders Power Dam.

When I began to think about postcards I did a quick internet search and found 28,200,000 hits for postcards; 12,900,000 hits for real photo postcards,

205,000 hits for postcard history; and 28,000 hits for St. Lawrence County postcards. So much information is out there about such a small thing. The Smithsonian Institution even has an online exhibit dealing with its own history through postcards entitled "Greetings from the Smithsonian: A Postcard History of the Smithsonian Institution" (www.siarchives.si.edu/history/exhibits/postcard).

Today people are using digital technology in place of the postcard. Emails, instant messaging, text messaging, twittering, ecards, digital postcards, and the like are becoming more and more popular. I wonder what will happen to this digital material in the future. Will these digital postcards be saved like the traditional postcard? How will the digital ones made today be accessed in the future as technology, storage media and software changes over time? At least traditional postcards can be looked at with the naked eye, though they are susceptible to damage and can be unavailable to future generations due to water, fire and mold or just because they get thrown away.

While working on this article I came across the term audio postcard, which I have heard used on North Country Public Radio

and National Public Radio (NPR). According to Jonathan Kern on NPR's website (www.npr.org/about/pitch/postcards.html) "Even people who can't define what they mean by an 'audio postcard' seem to recognize one when they hear it." According to Kern, audio postcards are recordings that last anywhere from one to five minutes, project a strong sense of place and use a lot of audio to make the listener feel they are present at the scene of the recording. And just like the traditional postcard, audio postcards give us a lot of information in a short space of time.

On a non-postal and sad note, the Town of Lawrence Historian Emeritus Elizabeth Winn passed away in March 2009 and Town of Pierrepont Historian Charlotte Regan passed away in July 2009. Both of these amazing historians were strong proponents for local history. Elizabeth Winn continued to attend historian meetings and read continuing education materials after her retirement as historian. Both Elizabeth Winn and Charlotte Regan faithfully and ably served their towns for a number of years. They are missed not only by their colleagues but also by the public they served so well.

OOPS:

One of our regular readers, Norman Young, brought the following error to our attention recently. On page 23 of our last *Quarterly* issue (Vol. LIII, no.3), identification of the women standing behind Lucille Wells Hunkins is reversed. Laura Davidson Fairbanks is on the left; Nellie Babcock Daly is on the right.

Dwight Church

The Flying Photographer and His Real Photo Postcards

Roger Bailey



Figure 1. Dwight Church, 1935. Photo by Carmeta Church

"What great good has this inefficient world accomplished with all the time it gained by sending picture postcards instead of writing letters?"

Anonymous, Commercial Advertiser, December 19, 1916

In their book *Real Photo Postcard Guide: The People's Photography*, authors Robert Bogdan and Todd Weseloh include a chapter that discusses how and why someone might be interested in researching the work of a photographer who made postcards.¹ A concluding paragraph in that chapter offers the following advice:

Writing an engaging, coherent, and information-packed narrative that organizes and integrates all that you

have uncovered about the photographer [think Dwight Church], and placing the photographer in his or her time [born 1891, died 1974], with larger trends and the structure of the community, would be the ultimate achievement. But do not desert leaving a record of your work because you [think author] may not be able to achieve that lofty product.²

There will be no lofty product here, but I do want to share some information I hope will contribute to better understanding and appreciation of Dwight Church and his work. Today, those who speak of Dwight Church often remember him as "a rather odd fellow, tall and lean, usually seen running up and down Canton's Main Street with his mail bag in hand." Dwight Church deserves to be better known.

I first became aware of Dwight Church through his postcards, but during the past several years, as I have looked more deeply into his life and work, I have discovered that his energy, compassion and spirit are characteristics that define a rare individual. I have come to appreciate how active he was and how much work he was doing—and how much he was living. Thanks to Dwight's daughter Bonnie Bliss, the archives of the St. Lawrence Historical Association now hold hundreds of documents and correspondences related to Dwight's work. I am hopeful that over the next few years more of these materials will come to light. For now, however, I intend to focus on Dwight Church and the real photo postcards he created and his life as a flying photographer.

The Early Years

Dwight Perry Church was born November 9, 1891, the son of Fred H. Church and Jennie Alvila Pierce, on a farm on the State Street Road, a mile north of Canton. He went to Canton High School but dropped out of school at age 17 before graduating. A *St. Lawrence Plaindealer* article of December 8, 1936, refers to Dwight's early involvement with photography:

When a lad Mr. Church became possessed of a small hand camera and began going to picnics and where groups were gathered and "snapping" them, and by diligence he found sale for these pictures. Then he graduated to a motorcycle upon which he carried a much larger camera and he covered a great deal of territory.

He found that he required someone to develop his films and print the pictures, so busy was he on the road.

In 1912, at 20 years of age, Dwight rented a space at 71 Main Street in Canton, over the Jamieson hardware store (today the Clark Insurance Agency). That same year, on November 12, he married Sarah Helen McNair. Dwight and Helen had three children, Mildred, Esther, and Betty.³ In 1917 he bought the house that stood on the west side of the Grasse River on the corner of Main and Gouverneur Streets in Canton that served as his home and photography studio for the rest of his life. Although the house was torn down in 1998, the two Norway spruce trees Dwight planted in the 1930s on either side of the front walk are still standing. In 1928 Dwight went to Buffalo, NY, where he took flying lessons and bought his first plane. In 1933 his marriage to Helen ended in divorce. On September 7, 1933, he married Carmeta Walters. Dwight and Carmeta had three children, David, Richard, and Bonnie. Dwight logged more than 2,000 hours flying, and it is estimated he flew 75,000 miles in his lifetime. He was an active member of the Canton Rotary Club, past president of the Grasse River Historical Association, and a 56-year member of the First Baptist Church of Canton. Dwight died of colon cancer on March 10, 1974, at age 82. He lived a very full life in those 82 years and has left us a great deal. Following his death, more than 13,000 of his photographic negatives and some prints were presented to St. Lawrence University's Owen D. Young Library by his daughter Bonnie Bliss. Lamar Bliss, Dwight's granddaughter, helped organize those materials as the Dwight Church Photograph Collection and created a database to make those images accessible.

While this article will focus on Dwight Church and his involvement with real photo postcards and flying, it is important to realize there were a great many other projects and activities he pursued during his lifetime. He was involved with canoeing, skat-

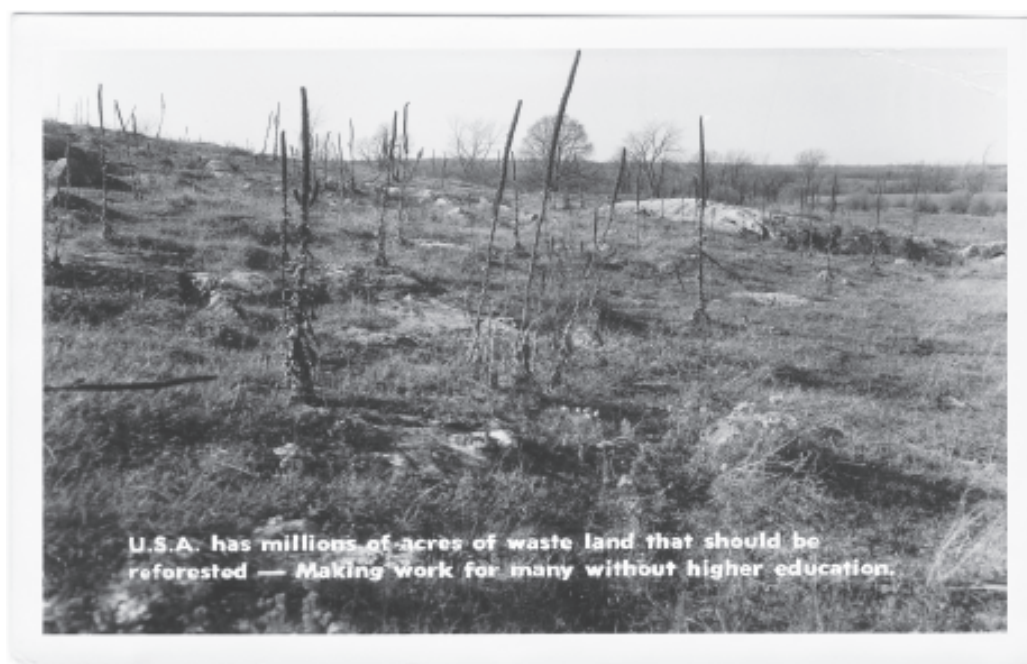


Figure 2. Dwight Church postcard of his home and studio at 7 West Main St. in Canton, from the early 1930s. Above the porch door: "By our works shal all men kno us", and "\$5=Photo=Co." On the right a model of Dwight's Monosport plane and the sign, "Licensed Airplane Transport Pilot for Charter."

ing, hiking, producing maple syrup, reforestation, highway safety, promoting a regional airport, designing and promoting a roof-top-highway, social justice, and a variety of other issues. His granddaughter, Lamar Bliss, says, "He was a vocal person. When he had an opinion, he printed up postcards and let you know about it."⁴ During the last decade

of his life Dwight wrote hundreds of letters offering criticism, advice, and encouragement to many people including Presidents Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon, Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference, several U.S. senators, and officials at the state and local level.

Figure 3. Dwight Church postcard promoting reforestation of waste lands. "A tree gives many rich gifts to this Earth—shade, lumber, pulp, traps moisture, breaks wind, purifies the air, protects wildlife, adds beauty and fragrance to Earth, prevents erosion 100%, fuel for fire, inspires the soul of man and gives joy to the creature. From "Glory in the Great Adirondack Forest", an undated paper written by Dwight Church.



It is not clear why and when some folks began to refer to Dwight P. Church as "Dippy" Church, using a word that sounds like his first two initials. I'm concerned that many people who have not yet become familiar with Dwight and his work can be misled by that moniker, even though it was not intended as a derogatory term.

At times Dwight referred to himself as "The Flying Photographer," but for those who knew him well he was known not only as a pilot and a photographer but also as a self-reliant individualist, an avid canoeist, a devout Christian, a community activist, and an environmentalist. Many of Dwight Church's photographs from the 1950s have a sticker attached to the back that reads:

If your special interests
are canoeing, flying or photography
get acquainted with
Dwight Church
at Photo Park, Canton, N.Y.
\$5 Photo Co.

An undated item in the archives of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association advertises the range of new and regular photographic services and products Dwight could provide.

For most of Dwight Church's life there were two newspapers serving Canton, the *Commercial Advertiser* and the *St. Lawrence*

Plaindealer. On the south side of Canton's Main Street, from 1897 to 1958, John Finnigan served as editor of the *Commercial Advertiser* and wrote a weekly column titled "Through a Main Street Window." On the north side of Main Street, from 1901 to 1947, Williston Manley managed and edited the *St. Lawrence Plaindealer* and wrote a column known as "The Rounder." Dwight respected both of these very lively and capable editors, and they gave Dwight plenty of ink over the years. He placed hundreds of ads in these two newspapers as well as in other papers in St. Lawrence County, and his business interests and flying adventures are the subject of many news items and feature articles. The earliest ad I have found ran in the October 18, 1910, edition of the *Norwood News*.

MAIL YOUR FILMS
To D.P. Church, Canton, N.Y. to be
developed into fine negatives. 10c for
Brownies, 25c for other sizes to 5x7.
Printing in sepia, green, gold or black
5c per postcard; prints 2c and 4c;
enlargements: 8x10 from your 4x5
negatives, 35c; smaller sizes in
proportions. 15c for mounting. First-
class work guaranteed. Cash to
accompany orders. See special offers
each week.

New Services Offered
Reproduction of color prints, oil paintings or magazine clippings
Also make Kodachrome slides or enlargements up to 11x14 inches
Regular Photographic Service
Portraits in natural color
Portraits in black and white
Photos for passports and citizenship
One minute photos for chauffeur license
Applications and I.D. cards
We take pictures of homes, business property, and aerial photographs
and commercial jobs, in color or black and white
Black and white films developed, printed or enlarged in 24 hours; daily

A few weeks later, on December 6, 1910, Dwight ran another ad in the *Norwood News*.

Reduced to these low prices until 1911:
8x10 enlargements, 25 cents; 5x7, 15
cents. Postcards printed only 45 cents
per dozen. D.P. Church, Canton, N.Y.,
Photographer

Apparently wishing to explore opportunities for employment outside the Canton area, on April 5, 1911, Dwight posted an ad in the *Albany Evening Journal*.

PHOTOGRAPHER wants position in
your best studio. Expert finisher of high
class work. \$35 weekly. D.P. Church,
Canton, N.Y.

By May of 1912, Dwight had settled into Canton when he ran an ad in the *Commercial Advertiser* that defined his new business name and the location of his photo studio.

CALL AND SEE WHY
IT IS

"The \$5 Bill"
Photography Company

Entire Floor Over Jamieson
Bros. Store

THE CUITEST CAMERAS
and the Best Supplies

The puzzling word "Cuitest" in the ad above could be the name of a camera Dwight was selling or it could be a printer's typo. More likely, it represents an example of Dwight's use of a simplified spelling system where "cuitest" is a substitute for the word "quietest." Dwight frequently used his own version of a simplified spelling system based

on phonetic spelling in which certain letters represent spoken sounds.⁵ In a photographic tip he sent out to his mail-order photography customers Dwight used his simplified spelling system.

Remember, the sunlite is weak during
the short Autum days...ur films will be
underexposed unless u increase the
exposure or take snapshots only thru
the middle hours of the day. (Use of
Panchromatic double fast film will
help.)

Regarding the company's name, Walter Gunnison wrote a profile of Dwight Church that ran in the *Massena Observer* on May 10, 1973, in which he describes how Dwight chose the name:

"... 'The \$5 Bill' Photography Company and offered a \$5 bill to anyone ordering \$20 worth of business."

Gunnison suggests Dwight found there was too much bookkeeping involved and soon withdrew the offer. The business became known as the "\$5 Photo Co." Sometime later "Photo Park Studio" was also used to define the company.

Dwight Church was more than an observer of the Canton scene; he was a player in it as well. Numerous newspaper items describe his involvement with the community and how he often invited villagers and travelers to Cook's Island in the Grasse River for picnics, camping, ice skating, or to view fireworks on the Fourth of July. He was most likely on a first-name basis with local merchants and he knew many of his photography customers personally. Dwight was on hand to shoot local ceremonies, including ribbon cuttings, visiting dignitaries, fairs, and disasters. The following item ran in the *St. Lawrence Plaindealer* on January 6, 1925:

"D.P. Church has taken advantage of the cold wave to flood and freeze

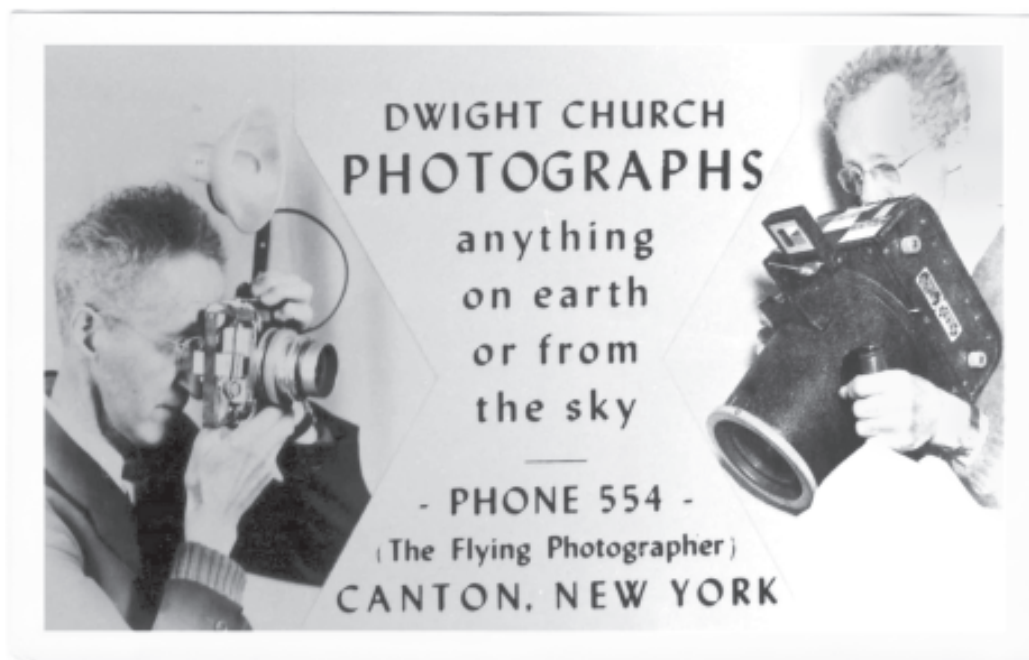


Figure 4. Dwight Church advertisement printed and distributed as a real photo postcard. In 1939 Dwight took a series of nine aerial photographs of Canton village from an altitude of 7,000 feet. He intended to produce a large composite photo but apparently was not able to satisfactorily complete the project.



Figure 5. Photo Park Camp Grounds. An April 16, 1934, edition of the Watertown Daily Times reported D.P. Church "has purchased the island on the Grasse River...and will use it in the winter as a skating rink... He offered the use of it as a public camping ground..." This photo was shot looking west from the grounds outside the Harrington Hotel.

over the skating rink on the island. He has installed a gasoline engine and water pump, and electric lights have been placed around the rink. Possibly some of the old timers at fancy skating will unearth their rocker skates and will cut the Dutch Roll and Grapevine on the ice to the edification of the younger set who have become addicted to the straight runners and hockey skates.”

Known in the 1930s as Cook's Island and located between the west and east channels of the Grasse River, the island in the image above is better known as Willow Island today. Apparently Dwight's generosity and initiative encouraged travelers to use the island as overnight camp grounds, and it was good advertising for his photography business next door as well. Although the *Watertown Daily Times* reported Dwight had purchased Cook's Island, I have not been able to confirm that claim.

The Real Photo Postcards

Halftones and Real Photos

Real photo postcards such as those Dwight Church produced, were black and white or sepia-toned images printed photographically directly onto light-sensitive photo paper. The paper was preprinted with designations for correspondence and address, a stamp box, and a credit line for the photographer and/or publisher. Postcards produced using an ink-based technology such as halftone lithography or photogravure are mass produced on printing presses from screens or plates and result in a dotted or grainy appearance in the image. At first glance these printed cards may look like a photograph, but under closer inspection the grays appear as smaller and larger dots, and result in an image that is not as sharp nor as detailed as the real photo postcards. The real photo postcards Dwight produced are usually smooth textured with a glossy face.

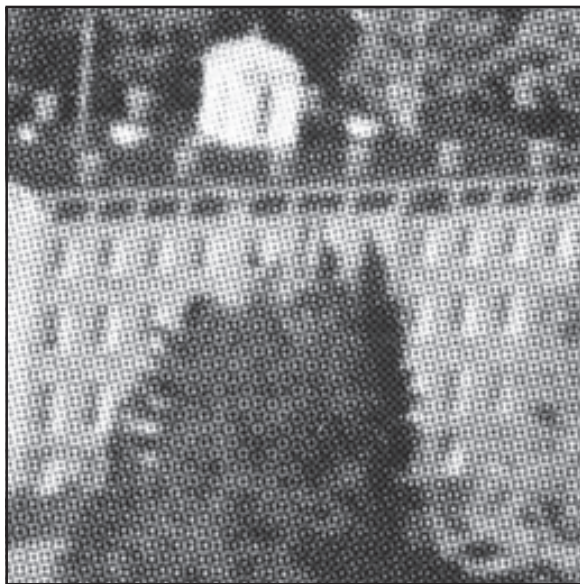


Figure 6, (left) Detail from a postcard image of Richardson Hall on the campus of St. Lawrence University, printed as a halftone lithograph. Unknown photographer.



Figure 7, (right) Detail from a postcard image of Richardson Hall on the campus of St. Lawrence University, printed as a real photo postcard by Dwight Church.

Figure 8. For many years Louis Russert and his wife ran the old Hotel "R" which was located across from the old fire station on Court Street, in Canton. The old Hotel "R" burned to the ground in the winter of 1950. This Dwight Church postcard shows the spacious interior of the new Hotel "R" which was later to become known as the St. Lawrence Inn. Today, North Country Savings Bank occupies this site.



Late in his career, in the 1960s, Dwight published a few postcards in color, printed in ink lithographically by Eastman Kodak in Rochester, NY. All the postcards reproduced in this *Quarterly* article have been digitally scanned and printed in black ink lithographically. They do not reveal the original tints and are obviously no longer "real" photos.

In nearly all of Dwight's postcard work, the image takes up the whole of one side of the card, usually framed with a white border. Only rarely did he use a mask of some sort to create a vignette effect or a shape other than a rectangle. Although flash systems were available in the late 1920s, and he could have used electric lights, Dwight shot few interior shots for his postcards and seemed to prefer shooting in available natural light.

Values and Ideas

Although it does not appear Dwight thought of himself essentially as a documentarian, the subjects he chose to photograph tell us a lot about the village of Canton, and they tell us something of the values and ideas of the photographer as well. His passion for our natural environment and his

respect for our institutions of learning and worship are directly reflected in the photographic images he produced.

For some people, the cards reproduced here may offer a nostalgic view of a bygone era. For others they may represent artifacts that express and, to some extent, celebrate the social history of this village. Some buildings seem to be virtually unchanged from 50 or even 80 years ago when they were first photographed, while others have changed considerably or disappeared completely. Author and critic Susan Sontag has suggested that to look at an old photograph is to feel how much younger a building looked or how much smaller a tree was. Sontag writes, "Photographs state the innocence, the vulnerability of lives heading toward their own destruction."⁶

We don't know what Dwight Church was thinking or feeling when he shot these photos, but I suggest they meant considerably more to him than what he could earn through sales. Dwight may have recognized he was recording some of what was disappearing in America, and he may have been aware of how photographing a subject is a way of conferring importance on it. Par-

Figure 9. Dwight Church postcard of Canton's public park and Main Street, probably shot in the 1920s. Dwight's Canton postcards are mostly views of churches, colleges, businesses, civic buildings, Main Street, the village park, recreation, rivers and streams, and evidence of the storms to which the village was subjected.



ticularly in the aerial photographs he called "Skyviews," Dwight demonstrates the notion of the photographer as tourist, not interested in making photos with ethical or sentimental associations but showing us scenes he was moved by and wants to share with us. These images offer an opportunity for us to think about what makes a community like Canton work and endure.

Dwight Church was a self-taught photographer who relied on his sense of wonder and his inventive and creative nature to learn how to take and make photographs. I do not believe he claimed to be an authority on photographic matters, and I doubt he gave much attention to the question of whether or not his photo postcards should be considered art. The complex relation between art and photography has been the subject of many books, but I would be surprised to find that Dwight read much of those materials.⁷ Dwight may have subscribed to *Kodakery*, the monthly journal for amateur photographers that first appeared in 1913. Published by Eastman Kodak Company in Rochester, *Kodakery* offered tips and instructions for young photographers and was a vehicle for advertising the latest Kodak products. Rather than

trying to make an "aesthetic statement," Dwight probably was more concerned with the photograph's ability to reproduce the physical details of a subject solely by controlling light and shade. His work invites us to look closely at the subject he has photographed, and at the same time he reminds us to slow down and look closely at the world around us.

Dwight's camera was rarely focused on the plain or common subject, and he did not rely on coincidence or chance to create interesting images. He seemed to possess an innate sensibility that recognized what he considered beautiful and important rather than trivial. To that extent these are idealized photographs. Only after seeing several hundred Dwight Church postcards did I realize he very rarely included an identifiable person in his photographs. His images were usually shot on exceptionally clear days, often in winter, creating crisp and sharp images with a depth of field that placed both the foreground and background in focus. Dwight contrasted rich dark tones with brilliant whites and established a full range of tonal values. He selected his film

and printing stock to maximize those qualities.

Local Views or "Topical" Postcards

Collectors of real photo postcards are divided into two camps: those primarily interested in local view cards, such as the images produced by Dwight Church, and others who are more interested in what are known as "topical" cards.⁸ In their book on real photo postcards, Bogdan and Weseloh suggest the collector of "topical" postcards is generally interested in specific subjects.

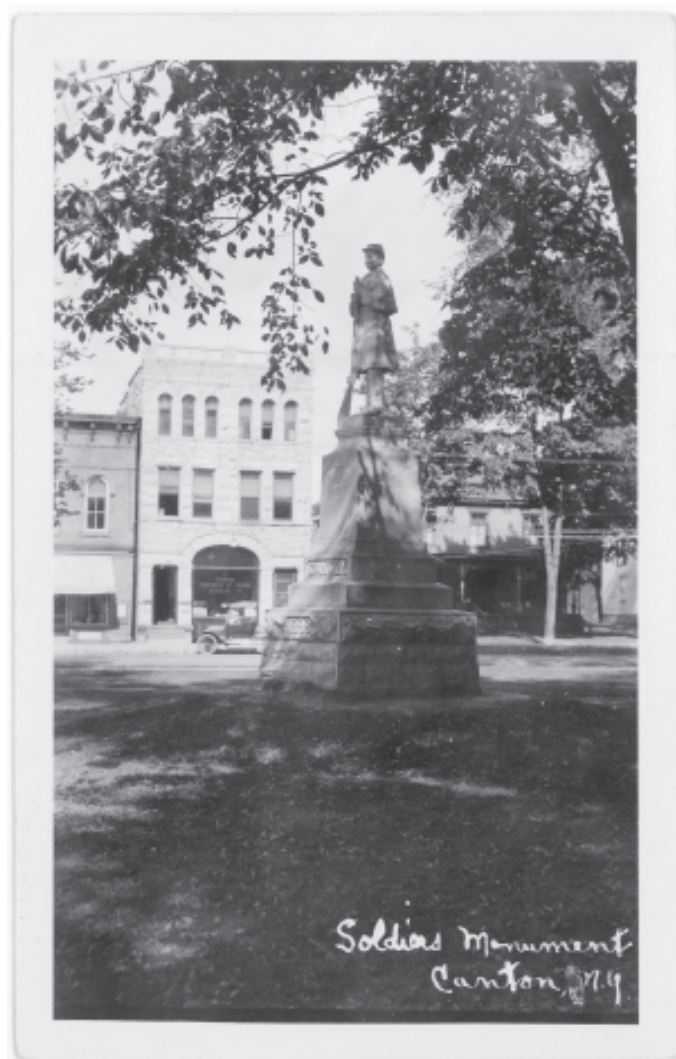


Figure 10. Dwight Church postcard of the Civil War Monument erected in Canton's Main Street park in 1898. Photograph probably taken in the early 1920s.

Examples of topical cards could include railroad depots, "freaks" of nature, tragic accidents, or tattooed women. Dwight was not interested in making postcards related to the peculiar or bizarre aspects of Canton's life. This means his postcards, and particularly the cards of Canton shown here, would be of little interest to collectors outside St. Lawrence County. These images are, however, of great value to those of us who care about how our lives, our environment, and the communities in which we live have changed over the past hundred years. Many of Dwight's postcards found in St. Lawrence County today were never sent through the mail but were apparently purchased and set aside as a kind of historical souvenir. Several cards could have been placed in one envelope and mailed for less than the cost of sending individual cards.

Dwight left us several thousand real photo postcards that are well made, both in the way they were photographed and in the way they were printed. The impact of his work is not just in the quality and quantity of his photographs but in his persistence during the nearly 60 years photographing Canton and the North Country. He sometimes photographed with a hand-held camera while walking the streets, and at other times he shot from a ladder mounted on a car. He made hundreds of photographs from 400 to 1,000 feet in the air, with his camera either mounted at a porthole in the fuselage of his plane or aimed through a window he installed in the floor. He may have taken some of his "Skyviews" with a hand-held camera as he leaned out the open door of his plane.

The Eastman Home Portrait Camera No. 3

The image on the cover of this journal and reproduced as figure 12 tells us about Dwight Church and about how he worked and it offers the opportunity to demonstrate what the computer allows us to do today as we study visual images. The original photograph was shot by an unknown photographer. The print I've seen is only 3 x 5



Figure 11. Photograph of Dwight Church at work, taken by an unknown photographer, about the mid-1920s. The "unknown photographer" could have been Dwight Church himself. His posture and hand position suggest Dwight may have set up another camera on a tripod and used a shutter release mechanism to create this image as a self-portrait.

inches in size, but when I scanned, digitized, and enlarged the image, I was able to obtain information not readily apparent in the original print.

On my computer monitor I could read "HUPP" in the lens of the single stoplight, and therefore was able to identify the car as a Hupmobile.(fig. 12A) Dwight's son Richard Church has confirmed that the car was a 1926 Hupmobile sedan.

A closer examination of the muddy license plate allowed me to read "1927."(fig. 12B) This fact allows me to suggest that Dwight was probably 36 years old when this photograph was shot.

The case in the foreground has a label on the inside of the lid, and when I selected and enlarged that label, and adjusted the value and contrast, I could decipher "Eastman Home Portrait Camera, No. 3." (fig. 12C) A Google search told me the Eastman Home Portrait Camera Dwight is working with in this image was manufactured from

1915 to 1929 and was offered only in the 8 x 10-inch size.

Lettered above the window on the rear of the car is "\$5 Photo Co. Canton-Pulaski." (fig. 12D) An *Oswego-Palladium-Times* newspaper of June 5, 1926, announced that a branch office of Dwight Church's Photo Park was opening over Luther's electrical store in Pulaski.

In faint lettering on the boot covering the spare tire is a reference to "Motion Pictures and Stills." I have not seen any movie footage, but apparently Dwight filmed several athletic events and alumni activities for St. Lawrence University.⁹ (fig. 12E)

The Eastman Home Portrait Camera Dwight is adjusting would produce an 8 x 10-inch negative, ideal for large landscapes and finely detailed portraits, but it would have been very cumbersome and not appropriate to use for his postcard work. (fig. 12F) There are only a few 8 x 10-inch negatives in the St. Lawrence University Archives Special Collection of Dwight Church photographs.



Figure 12. Dwight Church preparing for a photographic shot, 1926.

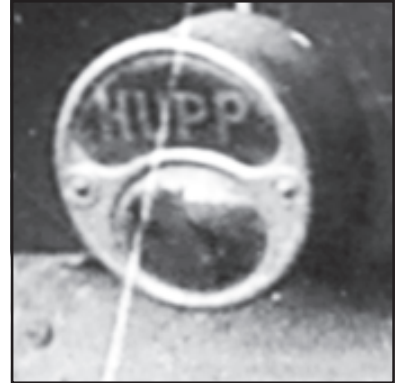


Figure 12A



Figure 12B



Figure 12C



Figure 12F



Figure 12E



Figure 12D

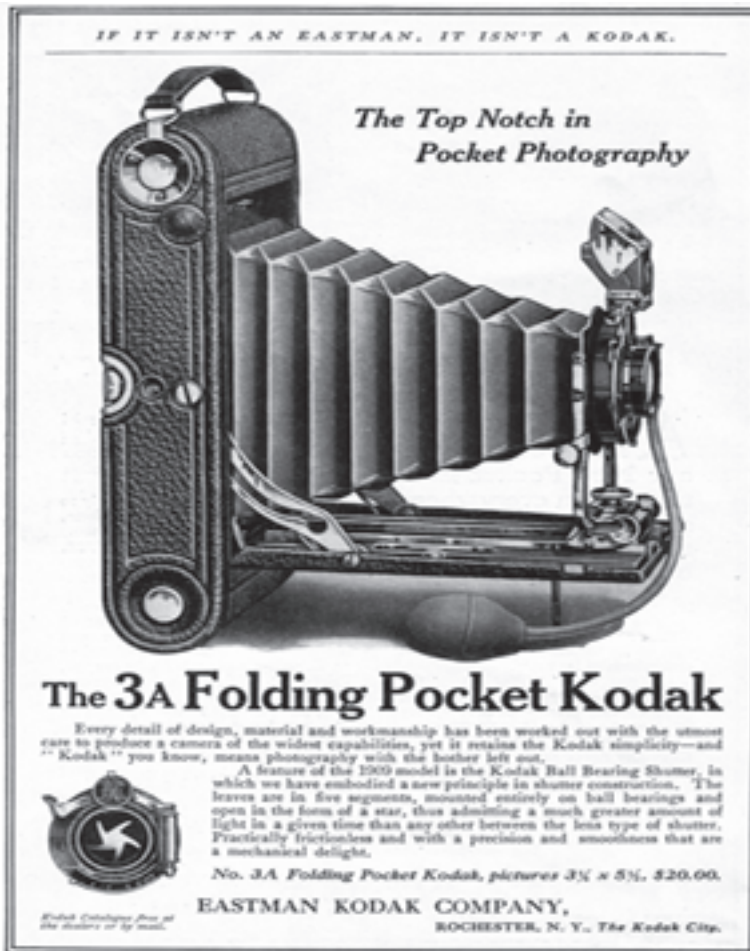


Figure 13. Kodak produced a bewildering array of versions of the Folding Pocket Camera. Although the 3A camera in this ad was not one of the "Autographic Jr." models Dwight Church used for many of his aerial photographs, it was very similar to his Kodak. All of the 3A Kodak cameras were known as "postcard" cameras.

The Kodak 3A Autographic Camera

In 1903 Kodak introduced the No. 3A Autographic Camera, known as the "Postcard" camera.¹⁰ It was a relatively small and lightweight camera, available with several different lens and shutter configurations. Its most unique feature was the 122A roll film and the basic size and shape of the camera body and lens created a negative $3\frac{1}{4} \times 5\frac{1}{2}$ inches, precisely the same size as a postcard. A door on the back of the Autographic Kodak covered a narrow slot through

which information such as a date or exposure could be recorded. Using a metal stylus, the camera operator could mark on the strip of paper centered between exposures. After writing on the paper, the door was left open to the sky for two to ten seconds, depending on conditions, and when the film was processed, that information appeared between frames on the edge of the negative. Dwight most likely experimented with this feature but devised his own methods for titling his images as described below.

During his lifetime Dwight used many different cameras, but the Kodak No. 3A Autographic Jr. was probably the one camera he used most often, particularly for his aerial photos. This camera was marketed by Eastman Kodak from 1918 to 1927 and sold at a list price of \$29.00. It had a Bausch & Lomb-Zeiss lens, a focal range from six feet to infinity, and shutter speeds of T, B, 25, and 50, and the view-finder was an angle mirror type.

Dwight's son Richard recently donated one of Dwight's No. 3A Autographic Kodak Jr. cameras to the Adirondack Museum in Blue Mountain Lake, NY.¹¹ The camera is now nearly 90 years old and probably was used to shoot thousands of images

over several decades, mostly aerial views, or as Dwight termed them, his "Skyviews."

¹²

We can be relatively certain how this Kodak 3A camera was used. Attached to the back of the camera is a label bearing the following instructions:

AERIAL ONLY
Use this camera only
for postcards....

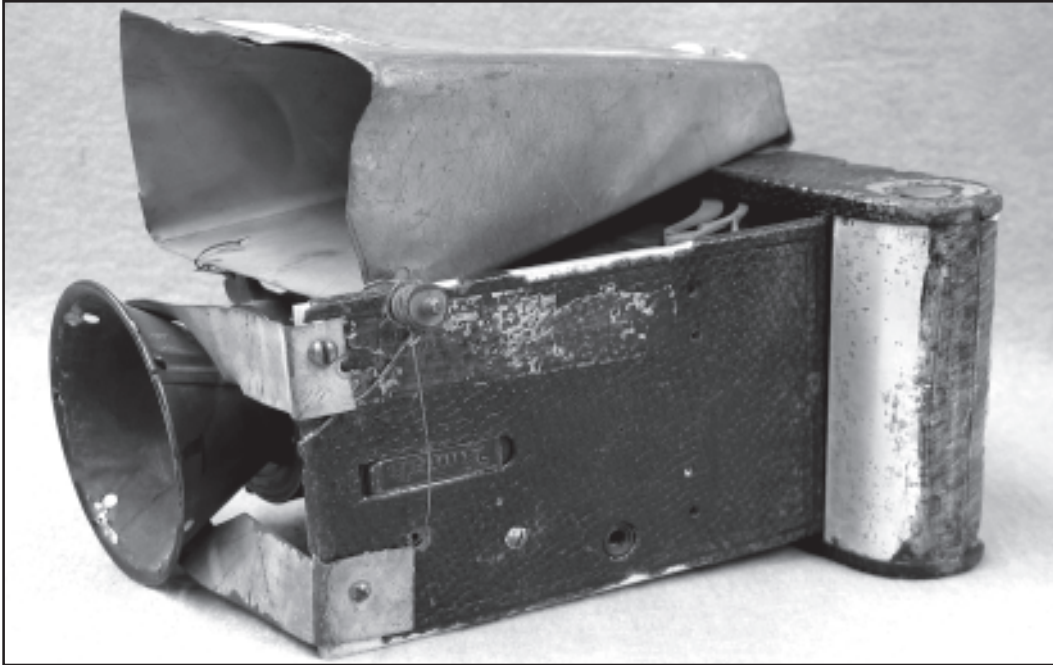


Figure 14. Dwight Church's Kodak 3A Autographic Jr. camera, donated in 2008 to the Adirondack Museum in Blue Mountain Lake, NY, by Richard Church. Dwight made several modifications to the camera to improve it for his specific purposes.

Dwight would have made the modifications to the Kodak 3A camera by working through a series of trials and errors. He fashioned an effective lens hood by altering a simple metal funnel, which he secured to the body of the camera. Without a lens hood, extraneous light could enter the lens causing flaring or fogging and could restrict the contrast of an image. The hood also provided some protection to the lens and shutter. The viewfinder on the original camera was a small cube with an angled mirror and would be nearly impossible to use for aerial photography. Dwight designed and constructed a metal viewfinder precisely proportioned to the 3 ¼ x 5 ½ inch postcard size. Similar in principle to a viewfinder now commonly used to photograph sports events, Dwight's redesign would allow a scene to be quickly framed. He added a device to help center the subject within the viewfinder. He attached a second label to the top of the viewfinder, apparently as a reminder that his design and construction were not totally accurate.

**Finder accurate left side.
20 degrees cut off right and bottom.**

The camera was most likely fixed at a focal range of infinity and a shutter speed of 1/50th of a second. Dwight altered the shutter release mechanism, rigging a wire that he could easily find and use to trip the shutter. Originally a folding camera, the bellows are now fixed fully extended and shrouded with metal. This camera could survive rough air travel and was probably capable of withstanding some wind buffeting as well.

Besides the Kodak 3A Autographic Camera, Dwight also owned a 4 x 5-inch Graflex camera that could be adapted to the 3 ¼ x 5 ½-inch postcard size. This allowed the use of sheet film that could be exposed one frame at a time allowing individual pictures to be processed separately. It is likely that he used one or both of these



Figure 15. Dwight Church at age 70 on his "sky ladder," at work on the corner of Main and Gouverneur Streets in Canton. Photograph taken by Carmeta Church in 1961 . The sky ladder shown here is mounted on Dwight's 1961 Chevrolet station wagon.

cameras to produce the images for most of the postcards seen here.

Dwight apparently did not care what his cameras looked like as long as they achieved the effect he wanted. He wasn't a man who had to impress others with his equipment or his possessions. He let his work and his actions speak for him.

The Postcard Business

Production

The most direct manner of making a photograph is to place a film negative in direct contact with the light-sensitive emulsion on a sheet of paper, expose the two to light for a specific length of time, and process the print chemically. Beginning in 1902 Kodak offered photo stock with a preprinted back that defined the areas for address, correspondence, and the stamp, initiating the real photo postcard era. The left-hand

edge on the back of the card usually defined the photographer's business.

For a photographer such as Dwight Church who had his own darkroom, the negative made from the 122 celluloid roll film and the Kodak 3A could be contact printed onto photo sensitive postcard stock without cropping or enlarging the negative. Alternatively, the exposed film could be sent to Kodak in Rochester for processing with a note indicating whether the client would like images printed on postcard stock or on standard photographic paper. This meant that for many amateur photographers a great number of one-of-a-kind postcards were produced. Because Dwight often printed proofs of his negatives on postcard stock, in many cases never intending to market the prints as postcards, a great number of one-of-a-kind Dwight Church

postcards were never addressed or sent through the postal system.

It is not easy to determine how many prints would be made of each of the negatives destined to be postcards, but it is reasonable to assume that Dwight might print anywhere from 25 to 100 cards if he felt he had a strong image and if he thought it would sell. A *St. Lawrence Plaindealer* article of April 18, 1939, reads as follows:

At his studio he invented mass production equipment so he could turn prints out almost while you waited for them. The flying game opened up, and with his monoplane, the 'D.P. Church Skyviews' were taken.

I've talked with Dwight's grand-nephew Bob Church¹³ and with Dwight's son Richard¹⁴ about a printing device, possibly sold by Kodak, to aid in producing postcards.

Bob remembers the printer was a desk-like affair, with a top that could be raised and lowered by a foot pedal. Richard remembers it had a row of buttons numbered from 1 to 10, related to exposure time. Both agree that while working under a safe light with the top up and a negative previously positioned securely on a plate of glass, the operator could slide a piece of light-sensitive postcard material in register over the negative, a foot pedal lowered the top to bring the negative and the paper in tight contact, and a light beneath the glass and negative automatically turned on for the proper exposure time. A timer turned the light off, and when the lid was raised, the exposed paper was removed and stacked to the side, and the cycle continued. When a quantity of cards had been exposed they were placed one at a time into a develop-



Figure 16. Dwight Church's somewhat cluttered darkroom, possibly at 7 Main Street in Canton, probably early 1920s. Several boxes of Azo postcard paper are on the shelves on the back wall, an enlarging camera is on the work counter on the left, and two contact printers are on the right in this photo.



Figure 17. Dwight Church's darkroom and production facilities at Photo Park, 7 West Main Street. Unidentified assistants are at work in January, 1924. Four separate processing tanks are in the center and a drum dryer is on the left in this photo.

ing solution, then into a stop bath, a fixer, and in a final wash before the postcards would be dried and flattened in a drum dryer. No one I've talked to knows where that postcard printer is today.

Most of Dwight Church's real photo postcards produced before 1930 were sepia-toned images on an off-white, almost beige stock. A photographer could create tonal work in several different ways: some printing papers had an emulsion that naturally produced light brown prints; the print could be subjected to a toner solution in processing; the paper stock itself could be beige or light brown or even greenish in color; incomplete or improper processing could lead to deterioration of the tones; exposure to strong sunlight could affect the tones of a print.¹⁵ During the late teens and twenties, Dwight frequently used an Azo photo postcard stock manufactured by

Eastman Kodak Company, light beige in color, and after it was exposed and developed, the print had a distinct sepia or brown tone. From about 1930 to 1960, most of his photo postcards were printed on a card stock much whiter than the Azo paper, and exhibit much greater contrast than in the earlier work.

Copyrights

Dwight Church probably never officially copyrighted any of his postcards, although the circled "C" appears on several cards. The card would have had to be registered, which meant filling out a form and sending it along with a small fee and two copies of the item to the U.S. Copyright Office. It probably would have been too much trouble for Dwight to bother with. His postcard images are now in the public domain.



Figure 18. Sky-view of St. Lawrence University and Canton Ag and Tech College campuses, probably shot in the 1940s, looking to the north. Flying for more than 30 years, Dwight shot many Sky-views of local college campuses. An image like this shows us some buildings that are still with us, some that were under construction when the photo was taken, and some that are long gone, but photographically preserved.



Figure 19. Phi Sigma Kappa Chapter House, located on Park Street in Canton. The house on the far right in this photo was known as the Pierce/Church home. After Dwight's mother Jennie Pierce died, Dwight's father Fred married Delta Pierce, sister of his deceased wife, and the family moved to the Park Street house. That house was later sold to St. Lawrence University and the building on the site is today the home of the Diana B. Torrey Health and Counseling Center.

Captions

Dwight Church's photo postcards usually include a title or caption in the image area to offer information to the viewer. If the information seems incomplete it may be because Dwight assumed the card would be sold locally so there would be no reason to make the captions explicit. As I examine his work I would like to see a date printed on each photograph, but Dwight seldom includes a date on the card. Perhaps he felt potential buyers would not be as interested if an image was known to be several years old. Early in his career he wrote captions freehand, in black ink, on the emulsion side of the negative to create white lettering on the finished print. This procedure worked, but to get the cleanest text, words and letters needed to be written backwards and from right to left—an awkward procedure easily leading to mistakes. On rare occasions he would scratch into the emulsion of the negative to create black lettering. Dwight's son Richard has said that for most of his postcards Dwight typed a set of titles on a sheet of paper, and Commercial Press printed the titles onto a celluloid sheet. Titles were then cut into thin strips which could be taped to the negative before printing. Black ink blocked out the light during exposure and created white characters on the printed postcard. Dwight usually found a place on the negative to contrast with the text, but some captions are hard to read because they lack contrast. The tape used to hold the celluloid strip to the negative also was a potential for distraction. One of the more obvious examples of an unreadable title is in figure 19 above where white lettering intended to describe the image is lost in the snow. While his real photo postcards present images that are generally stronger than the halftone printed cards, the titling system Dwight used was very inconsistent and often distracted from the overall photographic message. His captions add basic information about an image and were apparently not generally considered a formal part of the pictorial composition.

Sales of Postcards

The news item below, from the July 30, 1934, edition of the *St. Lawrence Plaindealer*, looks encouraging from a business standpoint, but I have not seen any Dwight Church real photo postcards published by the Tichnor Bros., of Cambridge, Mass.

THREE WEEKS' TRIP IN WOODS

D. P. Church, proprietor of the \$5 Photo Company, returned on Thursday from a three weeks' Adirondack trip. He recently received an order for 1,000 photographs of Adirondack views from Tichnor Bros., Inc., of Cambridge, Mass. This firm is one of three in the United States supplying colored post-cards.

Phil McMasters was a Canton printer and a friend of Dwight Church. Phil explained to Neal Burdick in a 1992 interview that Dwight "...always took his camera. Always. His pictures were all over the country....Every drugstore, every gas station, every place you can think of had Dwight Church pictures in it—postcards."¹⁶ Dwight Church was an ambitious and effective businessman and he found or invented various ways of promoting his business ventures. One of the many places he retailed his postcards was in the reception room of his Photo Park Studio, at No. 7 Main Street in Canton. Dwight placed in the local newspapers hundreds of ads related to photography and to flying, but many sales of his photo postcards were apparently the result of direct contact with a potential buyer. Frank White, retired Canton florist, flew with Dwight on many occasions. Frank has said that Dwight would often follow a road map as he flew, taking pictures of motels, farms, campgrounds, businesses, or other sites he found interesting.¹⁷ After processing and proofing the images, Dwight followed that same road map to locate sites he had photographed and would show proofs to potential buyers who might place an or-

der for an enlargement or for a quantity of postcards.

On a smaller scale, the postcard business was dependent upon potential buyers seeing postcards for sale in stores. The cards were displayed for sale in racks in drug stores, gas stations, country stores, and small hotels throughout St. Lawrence County, and sold on consignment. The Bing Stevens store on Main Street, across from the park in Canton, was probably one of the principal points of sale for Dwight's Canton postcards. Sherwin's Music Store, located in the Canton Town Hall at 44 Main Street, was another sales outlet. A sample postcard with an image of the Phi Sigma house on Park Street (figure 19 above) has a type-written message on the back that reads:

SAMPLE
of
"Varsity Views"
on sale at
Sherwin's, 44 Main St.

At times Dwight Church made photographs intended as parts of a series. The sample card for "Varsity Views" mentioned above is from one such series. Dwight's daughter, Bonnie Bliss, said that in the early 1950s Dwight assembled a group of images he called "The Heavenly Series." Bonnie has suggested the series was put together when Dwight and Carmeta Church frequently went on canoeing adventures with Frank and Beulah White.¹⁸ I have not found that those photos were ever published as a series of postcards.



Figure 20. In the late 1940s and into the '50s Craig Hill was a Canton ski facility featuring a tow rope, flood lights for night skiing, and a lodge for shelter. The facility was located on the west bank of the Grasse River, close to where Cornell Drive runs on the SUNY Canton campus today. It was part of a recreation program sponsored by the Canton Youth Commission.

Costs and Revenues

It is difficult to know what kind of returns the postcard work provided. The cards would likely retail for no more than three to five cents if purchased separately, and less if a dozen or more cards were purchased. Production costs would have included the cost of cameras and darkroom equipment, film, postcard stock, developing chemicals, wages for assistants (when business was good), transportation, advertising, and overhead. Compared to working in a larger market to make and sell postcards, Dwight's relationship to Canton was a good match, in part because he could print short runs at relatively low cost, which gave him more latitude to photograph a greater variety of scenes. Dwight not only produced many cards that could be purchased and sent through the mail system for one-cent postage, he also published and distributed cards that were given away free, to advertise his line of photographic services and to express and promote any of the many causes important to him.

The earliest Dwight Church real photo postcard I have seen is postmarked 1913 and has some information printed on the back concerning pricing of his service and products as well as the name of his business:

Kodak films dev. 10 cents,
printed 15 cents.
Try "The \$5.00 Bill" Photo Co.

Several cards from the 1920s indicate the change in the name of Dwight Church's photography business and a slight adjustment of prices.

\$5-Photo-Co.
Films developed for 2 cents,
Prints 3 cents each.

Another version, from the later 1920s, reads:

"Pure AS SNOW"
Kodak prints made by
\$5-Photo-Co., Canton, N.Y.

Dwight's work involved more than his cameras and his darkroom. He worked at advertising and promoting his business as well. For example, one of the creative ways he promoted his services and products ran in a May 15, 1928, edition of the *Commercial Advertiser*.

Free Bathing Caps
The \$5-Photo-Co. has 250 bathing caps, assorted colors, to be given away absolutely free. The only condition being that you must call at the studio in person and buy one Kodak film, any size. Come quick. Photo Park Studio

Some of the postcards Dwight Church published were produced primarily to promote a particular business. This kind of project may not be as personal as others but still contributes to a discussion about how images work and about what gives photographs their persuasive powers. Two such examples are postcards of the Harrington Hotel and Russell's Drug Store in Canton.

Determining the Age of a Real Photo Postcard

Most real photo postcards include information printed on the back in the stamp box corner to identify the manufacturer of the photographic paper.¹⁹ One can approximate the age of a real photo postcard by knowing when the paper manufacturer was in business. For the first 75 years of the 20th century, the Eastman Kodak Company was the dominant manufacturer of nearly all things photographic. In the Dwight Church photos I have examined, the paper stock used most often was branded "Azo," some simply read "Kodak," and a few read "EKC." These were all prod-



Figure 21. Located at 4 West Main St. in Canton, the Harrington advertised it was "A place as comfortable as your home, catering to tourists and commercial travelers, hot and cold running water in every room. Cuisine Unexcelled. Rates \$2.00 and up."



Figure 22. Located at 63 Main Street in Canton, this photo of Russell's Self Serving Drug Store was probably shot in the late 1950s. Today, the space has been divided and a lawyer's office is on the left side of the building and an insurance agency is on the right.

ucts of the Eastman Kodak Co. in Rochester. I have seen several non-Kodak cards manufactured by Defender Photo Supply, also a Rochester company. Most of the postcards Dwight Church produced before 1930 were sepia-toned images printed on Azo stock, and after 1930 and into the 1960s, most of the postcards he produced were on a stock labeled either "EKC" or "Kodak."

If the real photo postcard was sent through the US mail system, the information in the stamp box concerning photographic paper would be covered by the stamp. Certainly the best way to determine when a card was sent is when the sender wrote the date directly on the card. The second best is when the postmark date and location were printed cleanly and are still legible after so many years. One other clue to dating a postcard involves the denomination of the stamp. From 1898 to 1952, with exceptions for two brief periods when the rate was raised to two cents, it cost one penny to mail a post-

card in the United States.²⁰ I have seen Dwight Church postcards bearing one-cent to six-cent stamps, but almost all the cards in this article are of the one-cent variety. Of course postcards printed earlier could have been mailed later, so there is no assurance that the denomination of a stamp will accurately tell us when a photograph was made.

The Flying Photographer

In one of the many Dwight Church papers now in the archives of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association, Dwight reflects on changes in aviation and defines how he first became interested in flying.

...I recall being in Phila Pa one fine Spring day (in 1928) and heard airplanes circling about the city. I had never seen many planes nor thot much about their magic but somehow that day they got me and after

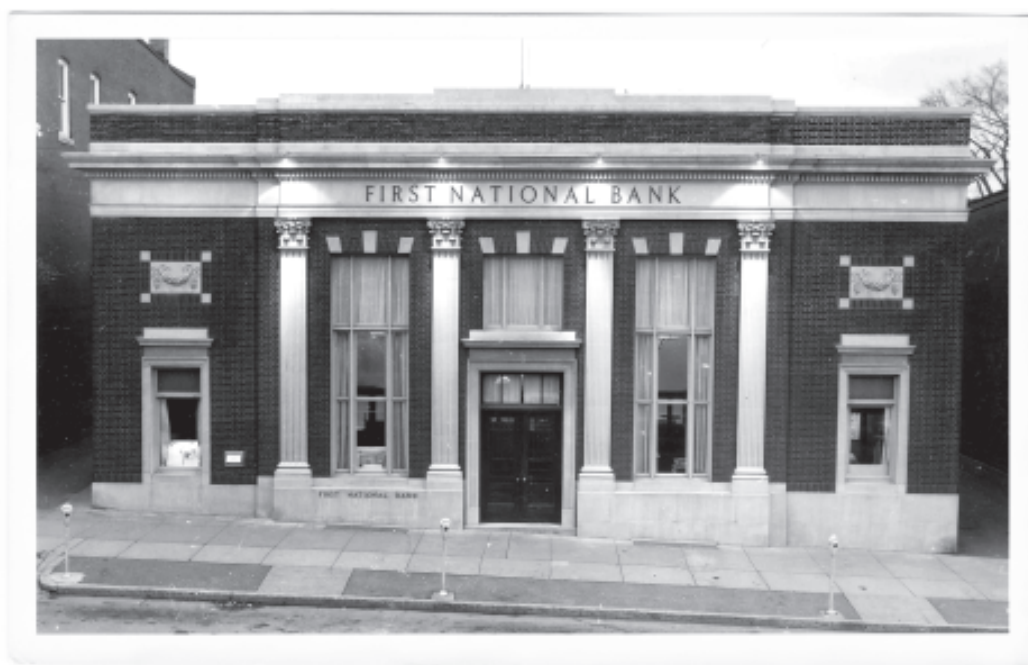


Figure 23. First National Bank, now the home of Community Bank, N.A., located at 80 Main Street in Canton. This simple yet elegant image would not have been enhanced had Dwight Church chosen to add a caption. I have always found it interesting to see the relationship between a handsome building and a sloping site it sits on. Here, Dwight's composition seems to invite us to notice that relationship.

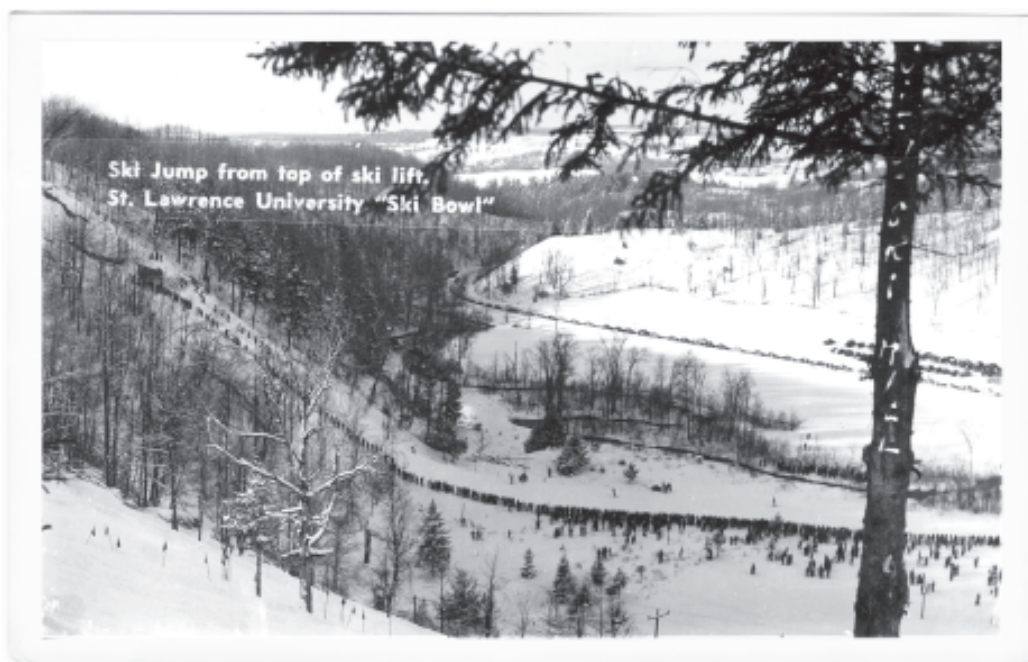


Figure 24. St. Lawrence University's Snow Bowl, featuring a 45 meter ski-jump, was located two miles south of South Colton on Highway 56. Inexplicably, Dwight has lettered "SLU Ski Hill" on the trunk of the tree on the right in this photo, probably shot in the 1950s.



Figure 25. It is somewhat unusual that a caption in a Dwight Church Skyview identifies as many features as in this photo of the St. Lawrence campus shot in the late 1950s or early '60s. However, it is not unusual to find that someone has drawn or marked on a photo postcard, in this case apparently to point out (originally in blue ink) the sender is rooming in a Dean-Eaton dorm.

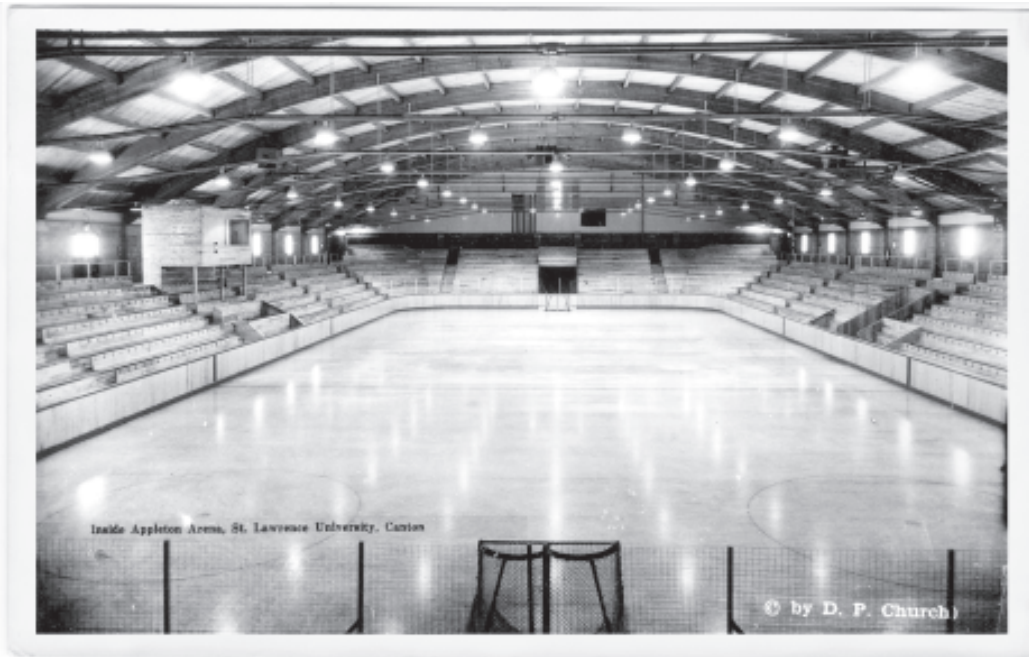


Figure 26. Inside Appleton Arena, St. Lawrence University, Canton. Dwight Church chose a symmetrical composition for this postcard shot, and over-head lighting effects and reflections on the ice give the image its impact. This photo was shot sometime after January 6, 1951. On that date the first sporting event was played in Appleton Arena when St. Lawrence defeated the University of Toronto in a basketball game, 66-58.



Figure 27. Across the top of this photograph Dwight Church wrote "My First Flying Lesson, Jan. 6, 1929." There is a possibility that this event is taking place at a Miami, Florida, airport. As a document it marks a very significant moment in Dwight Church's life. Shot by an unknown photographer.

considerable effort I tracked them down to a small cultivated (field) just across the Del. River bridge, where three biplanes were giving flights. It struck me that if they could fly from a small field like that there was no reason why I couldn't too; there was plenty of big and much better fields all around Canton, my home town. I inquired as to the cost of such a job and was surprised to learn that it was \$2900 with free instruction up to ten hours...

Less than a year after seeing those bi-planes in Philadelphia, Dwight placed an order for a plane from the Mono-Aircraft Corporation in Moline, IL. He ordered a plane through Becker Flying Service in Buffalo, but apparently it was not available immediately and he arranged to temporarily purchase an Alexander Eaglerock bi-plane.

On February 1, 1929, the Aeronautics Branch of the Department of Commerce in Washington, DC, issued a Student Pilot's Permit to Mr. D. P. Church.²¹

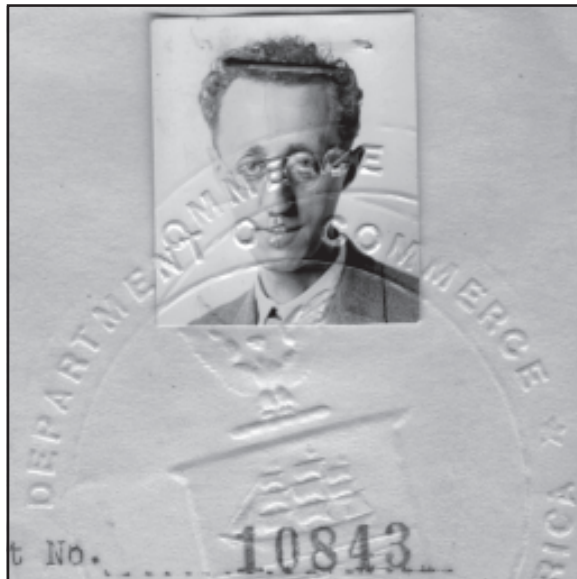


Figure 28. Dwight Church, detail from Student's Pilot Permit No. 10843. This permit allowed Dwight to receive instruction and to pilot licensed aircraft in solo practice flights, during the course of instruction.

On March 22, 1929, The *St. Lawrence Plaindealer* ran a news item, most likely written by Williston Manley, playfully expressing what some members of the Canton community thought of Dwight and his new interest in flying.

Some of the many friends of Dwight P. Church wagged their heads and said they were positive that the creator of the \$5 Photo Co. had gone completely haywire. He'd up and bought a single motor, single seater, Mono-coupe monoplane. As a result his friends were already putting in their order for floral wreaths and the local undertakers were wearing soft and doleful smiles. Everyone agreed that Church was a reckless, head-strong individual. They had known that for some years, ever since he bought a Harley-Davidson motorcycle and had churned the countryside roads going around and taking "snaps" of folks. But to invest \$2675 in a 62 h.p. buzz-kite was certainly an invitation to sure death in the minds of many.

While most of the information in the item above is obviously written as humor, other "facts," such as that relating to the description of the plane, are contradicted by later newspaper accounts.

One of the personal papers and copies of correspondence now in the archives of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association is a paper written by Dwight Church, date stamped "Jan. 14, 1974," two months before he died. One side of this paper appears to be a four-part summary of Dwight's life. A single line related to flying reads: "1929-Learned to fly May 17th to July 1st."

On May 31, 1929, the *St. Lawrence Plaindealer* ran the following item:

Dwight P. Church had just written his Canton friends from Buffalo where he was taking flying lessons to tell about the fun he was having while learning to pilot a plane.

Three months later, on September 3, 1929, in the *St. Lawrence Plaindealer*:

Many Canton people noticed a bi-plane, an American Eagle, circling over this village Friday afternoon, thinking it was probably one of the machines here for the fair. They were mistaken. Dwight P. Church was at the controls and has the "ship" parked at the Smith farm just west of the village. Mr. Church has recently passed his pilot's tests and is a licensed pilot. He has been waiting some time for the delivery of his Eagle Bullet plane and the company has furnished him with this American Eagle until delivery can be made on the machine he has ordered. Canton has therefore entered into the aviation

game by having a local pilot with a plane.

I suspect Williston Manley has confused the American Eagle he mentions above with the Alexander Eaglerock bi-plane Dwight purchased. The Alexander Eaglerock was powered by a Curtis OX-5, a 90 horsepower engine of World War I vintage, and could cruise at 70 mph.

From the *Commercial Advertiser* on December 31, 1929:

CHURCH PLANE HOUSED SAFELY

When winter came suddenly a few weeks ago D. P. Church, whose land-ing field is a short distance west of the village, had not completed erecting the hangar which he was engaged in building for his plane. The sides were up but the roof



Figure 29. Dwight Church's first plane, an Alexander Eaglerock biplane, shown here in his hangar on the Erwin Smith farm on the Old DeKalb Road, Canton, in the spring of 1930. Studying this photo as a digital image on a computer monitor revealed a sign at the back of the hangar which reads: "Landings 50 cents, Pay at the Farm House."

was not on, so a temporary covering was placed until milder weather would allow the putting on of a more permanent roof. That mild weather didn't materialize and a heavy wind took the covering off. The recent storm beat down into the enclosure covering the plane with twelve to twenty inches of snow and ice, and things looked pretty dubious for the plane.

However, late in the week, Friday and Saturday, Mr. Church with workmen was able to put the roof on and protect the plane from further storms. The snow and ice was cleaned off the plane but no attempt was made to remove the snow from the hangar, as this would be a very difficult job, and can wait on mild weather and thaw to remove it.

The Monosport Airplane, NC113K

On May 27, 1930, the *Commercial Advertiser* ran an item titled "Dwight Church Pilots Home Monosport Plane." The second of the two paragraphs reads:

The new plane is only a two passenger, as the company never brought out the type of plane he had contracted for last year. The new plane is a beauty and has the very latest equipment including a starter, operated by the man in the plane. It is not necessary to stand on the ground and whirl the propeller as on the older type planes. Mr. Church is expecting a very pleasant summer, as he is completely "airminded" the airmen say, and as much at home in the air as a fish is in the water.



Figure 30. Dwight Church postcard of the Monosport Model 2, NC113K. The caption reads, "For any kind of aerial service see D.P. Church, Photo Park, Canton, N.Y.— Licensed pilot & plane." Dwight apparently drew in ink around the tail section on his negative to create a white line on this print, creating greater contrast with the background. I have yet to discover references to "Love Nest."

Joseph Juptner has written extensively on the history of aviation, and volume three of his *U.S. Civil Aircraft* includes several pages of information about the Mono-sport in general and Dwight's NC113K in particular.²² NC113K was one of only seven of the Monosport Model 2 planes built by Mono Aircraft Corporation at Moline, IL. Built in August 1929, it was priced at \$5,750 at the factory, later reduced to \$4,250 in May of 1930 during the Great Depression. Originally rigged for racing and registered as NR113K, flown by test pilot Les Bowman, it placed second in Class D category in the Miami to Cleveland Air Derby. Registered soon after as NC113K, it was flown to Tucson, AZ, and Los Angeles, CA, and eventually to Buffalo, NY, where it was purchased on May 19, 1930, by Dwight Church. He traded for it against his Alexander Eaglerock biplane, plus \$2,200.

The Monosport Model 2 was powered by the Kinner K5 (five cylinder) 100 h.p. engine. It was a high-winged cabin plane that seated two side by side. Its overall length was 21 feet 5 inches and it had a wing span of 32 feet 3 inches. With 32 gallons of fuel the payload was 208 pounds. The Monosport had a cruising speed of 110 mph and a landing speed of 45 mph. Consuming six gallons of fuel per hour, the plane had a range of 550 miles.

The fuselage framework was built up of chrome-moly tubing and wooden fairing strips and fabric covered. Visibility was somewhat restricted directly forward but there was good visibility to the side and a large skylight in the cabin roof provided good vision upward which must have been very useful for an aerial photographer making steep turns around a site. A metal propeller and dual stick controls were standard equipment and the engine starter was optional.

My research regarding the first planes Dwight Church flew led me to a website posted by Gary Hyatt when I did a search for "NC113K," the registration number painted on the wing and tail of the airplane.



Figure 31. If I had only one image to use to illustrate this article, this would be the photograph. It is a real photo postcard; it is an image of Dwight Church, the "Flying Photographer;" it is NC113K, his Monosport; it is an advertisement for his business; it is Dwight's use of the photographic processes to share all of the above with us.

A few years ago Hyatt acquired access to a 218-page, leather-bound, folio-sized register from the Davis-Monthan Aviation Field in Tucson, AZ. The register is a record, in a pilot's own handwriting, of flight activities in and out of the airfield from 1925 to 1936. Hyatt's web site is a wonderful research tool and resource for investigators of early aviation history.²³ I learned NC113K had landed twice at Tucson, on March 7



Figure 32. NC113K and hangar at the Erwin Smith farm on the Old DeKalb Road, Canton. Dwight shot and printed other postcards of this hangar, without a plane. One of those captions reads, "Airplane Hangar, Delivered, Set Up Complete for \$1440. Fireproof & Portable. D.P. Church, Canton, N.Y."

and 14, 1930, not piloted by Dwight Church, but only two months before Dwight was to buy the plane. Hyatt encourages site visitors to offer information and photographs related to the planes and flight activities logged into the register, to make the site's data and knowledge bases open-source. I have contributed several photographic images to the site and Hyatt has contributed his own observations and comments as well.

The Canton Airport

In the process of trying to locate where Dwight Church kept his plane in the Canton area, I learned a man by the name of Jack Smith might be able to help me.²⁴ In my first phone call to Jack Smith I asked if he knew of Dwight Church, and Jack's answer was, "Did I know him? He was my

boyhood idol." My subsequent talks with Jack resulted in some interesting discoveries.

From the late 1920s until 1945 or 1946, Jack's adoptive father, Erwin Smith, owned and operated a farm (now the teRiele farm) on the east side of the Old DeKalb Road, just south of where Coakley's Ace Hardware is today and adjacent to what once was the Brooklyn Schoolhouse. Late in the fall of 1929, Dwight purchased and erected a metal hangar, situated just east of the Erwin Smith barn. (The barn was destroyed by fire on June 2, 2009.) I hoped I might find that Dwight's hangar now serves as a machine shop or storage shed, but the hangar is no longer on the property.

As a ten-year-old boy in the early 1940s, on many occasions Jack Smith watched Dwight take off and land on the grass strip that ran north and south, paral-

lel to the Old DeKalb Road, on the north-west edge of Canton. As compensation for use of the airstrip Dwight agreed to pay Erwin Smith 50 cents each time he landed at the site. Dwight's use of the airstrip was before the 245 KV power lines were installed across the field in the mid-1940s. Jack remembers the times Dwight enthusiastically explained the basics of flying and demonstrated the controls and instruments. Dwight was willing to give young Jack flying lessons until Jack's mother learned about the plan, and, very quickly and emphatically, squelched the idea.

In a December 15, 1931, item in the St. Lawrence Plaindealer, Dwight wanted to let readers know flying was not expensive. In his first 100 hours of flying, he had flown 9,000 miles at a cost for the season of \$202.90. He detailed the costs:

Gasoline, 432 gallons	\$86.40
Oil, 15 gallons.....	16.75
Repairs	3.75
10 spark plugs	10.00
Yearly physical exam	15.00
Local landings, 142	71.00
<hr/>	
Total expenses.....	\$202.90

Dwight referred to the airstrip on the Old DeKalb Road as his airport, but he often flew in and out of other local airstrips including those at Ogdensburg, Potsdam, and Massena. On May 28, 1936, Dwight placed an item in the *Massena Observer* with the following information:

NOTICE
 Due to the inaccessibility of the airport because of cattle, I am obliged to cancel flying at Massena. Will be glad to serve you at my Canton airport.
 D.P. Church

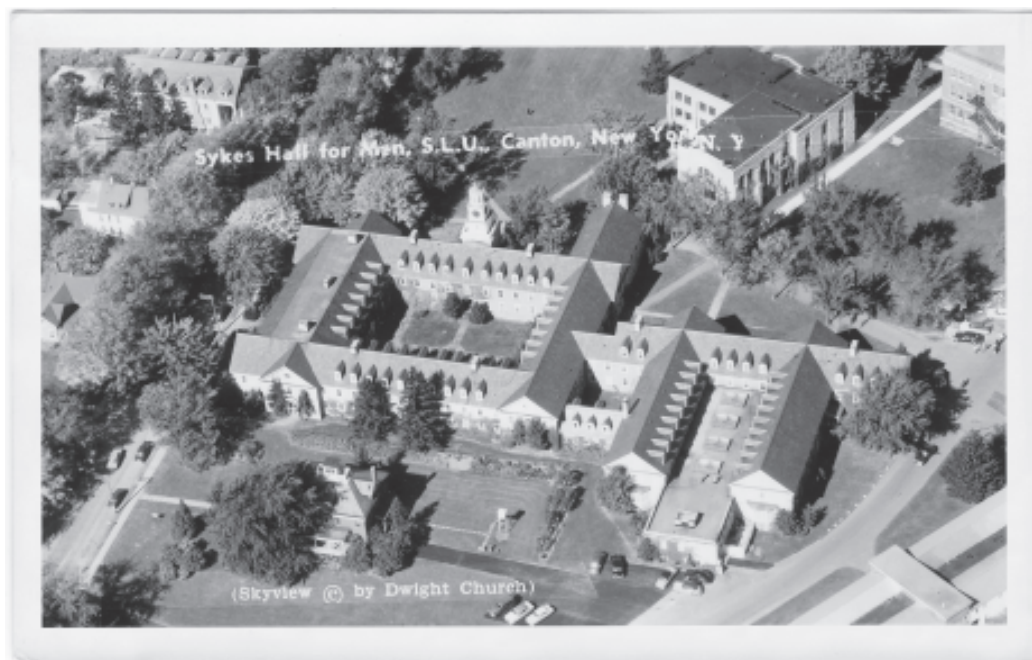


Figure 33. Skyview of Sykes Hall, St. Lawrence University, Canton. This is not the image referred to in the newspaper clip above, but it does make it quite clear that Dwight was flying low over the Sykes dorm. The camera seems to be aimed nearly straight down for this shot so Dwight is either in a very tight bank or he's shooting through the floor of his plane. Federal Aviation Administration regulations would not allow flying this low over a campus today.

Flying Low

An item from the July 2, 1935, edition of the *St. Lawrence Plaindealer* offers a sense of Dwight's low-level flying to create some of the photographs he called "Skyviews."

A NICE AERIAL VIEW

D.P. Church of the \$5 Photo Company has taken many interesting aerals, but one of the best which he has yet exhibited, and of particularly local interest, is a view recently shot from about 400 feet up of the University campus. In it one gets a full sweep of all the buildings nestling amid the abundant foliage of the campus.

Dwight Church took thousands of "Skyviews," while flying various airplanes from 1929 to 1970. A Norwood News article of June 18, 1930, says NC113K, the Monosport, was "equipped with two cameras,

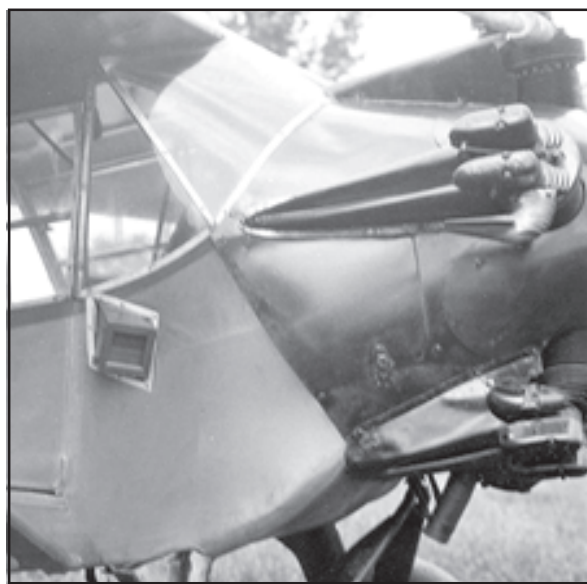


Figure 34. Detail of camera porthole on passenger side of the Monosport NC113K. I've never seen images nor read a description of how a camera was mounted inside the cabin of the plane, but I can appreciate the difficulty controlling a plane and trying to hand-hold a camera at the same time. NC113K is the only Dwight Church plane I've seen with a camera porthole, but there may have been others.

still and motion picture cameras, arranged in such a manner that he can take pictures while flying." Dwight built a camera port-hole into the passenger (right-hand) side of the fuselage to facilitate taking his photos as he descended over a subject.

Dwight later modified the floor of one of his planes so he could photograph downward rather than in a sharp turn. There are reports that he was able to remove the door from a plane and lean out, holding on to a strut to take photographs. Besides the Alexander Eaglerock and the Monosport, Dwight later flew a Piper Cruiser as well as a Cessna 140. When he couldn't fly his own plane he would rent a plane for a specific job from the airports in Ogdensburg and Massena and from Clarence Petty at the Potsdam air strip.

Dwight's daughter Bonnie recalls her joy and the excitement as a child flying with her father.²⁵ She reports they flew in a Piper Cub, with the door removed for an unobstructed view, and serving as crew on some of Dwight's photographic missions:

Once he had a firm hold on the camera and arranged its settings, he would put the plane into a steep bank and we would spiral slowly, silently, on our side toward the earth as he clicked pictures... Job finished, with a great roar of the engine we would be up and away.

When Dwight was flying he was not only interested in shooting photographs for his postcard business. Local newspapers frequently ran Dwight's articles intended to interest the public in flying with him on sight-seeing trips over the county. He ran ads such as the two below, offering cross-country trips to California, New Orleans, or the 1939 World's Fair in New York City. From the *St. Lawrence Plaindealer* on February 8, 1938, Dwight offered the following challenge and opportunity:

Isn't there one person in Northern N.Y. with enough love for adventure to fly to Florida by way of St. Louis, New Orleans, St. Petersburg and many other ports in Fla., returning by Savannah, Washington, New York, making a ten day trip? Communicate at once with Dwight P. Church, pilot, Canton, N.Y.

The following ad ran in the *St. Lawrence Plaindealer* on October 10, 1939:

Week-end flight to World's Fair. Leave Canton 6 a.m., Saturday, Arrive 9 a.m. Leave Fair 5 p.m. Sunday. Arrive Canton 8 o'clock. \$26.75. No traffic problems. Inquire D.P. Church, Canton, N.Y.

In a May 8, 1957, *St. Lawrence Plaindealer* article Dwight was quoted saying "Since I have to maintain my airplane for photographic work and pay storage and insurance, it might as well be used evenings. I enjoy sharing the miracle of flight with others. Phone 2860. Dwight Church."

Frank White and his wife Beulah shared many canoeing adventures with Carmeta and Dwight Church during the 1950s and 1960s.²⁶ Frank often accompanied Dwight on aerial photo shoots and has said his job was to watch out for other planes while Dwight circled a site to take pictures as he spiraled downward. Besides shooting for postcards, Dwight was looking for sites he and Frank could later return to with their canoes. Aerial navigation maps of the North Country were not readily available during the 1930s and '40s, so Dwight would often rely on highway road maps to chart a route.

In a May 9, 1939, item in the *Commercial Advertiser*, Dwight summarized his first ten years of flying, offering the following facts:

Out of the total number of flights made, the total being 1,646, only 42

were made at airports and some of those were at the old Watertown Airport near Dexter, NY. 1,604 were made from meadows and pastures such as I use around Canton, and some on ice in rivers and lakes. I have carried 1,307 passengers, about 280 from Canton and the rest from neighboring towns.

Concluding Thoughts

Coming of age in the early 1900s, Dwight Church witnessed many exciting technological changes as well as troubling events of the 20th century. He experienced changes in transportation from the horse and buggy to the motorcycle and automobile; he was one of the photographers who made the move from bulky glass-plate photography to light-weight cameras and roll film; he was one of the pioneers of the aviation industry. His life spanned World War I, World War II, and wars in Korea and Vietnam. He was keenly aware of new challenges to our environment and threats to our personal well-being that come with intensive industrialization and rapid population growth. It would be interesting to see what Dwight Church would have been able to do with technologies available today. For example, aerial photography can be carried out with remote controlled aircraft, using gyro stabilized camera systems and high-quality digital photography. Computer editing equipment allows images to be enhanced or modified to meet a client's needs.

Phil McMasters said to Neal Burdick in 1992:

You know, everything he did, he took seriously. If he talked to you he was sincere about it. If he gave you a piece of advice, you wanted to listen carefully because he sincerely meant it. Of all the things I remember about Dwight, that was it. He enjoyed life as much as any man I ever knew.²⁷

Dennis Church, Dwight's great-nephew, expressed a similar view when he said, "If time were life, then certainly Dwight Church was not about to waste one minute of it....His view of nature was a kind of religious fervor for the out-of-doors...He participated in everything he did with vigor and joy." ²⁸

Today, 35 years after his death, many of those who remember Dwight Perry Church still refer to him by that word that sounds like his first two initials, and they are likely to characterize him as "unconventional" or "eccentric." As I have examined Dwight Church's photographic work and become more familiar with writings by him and about him, I think of him as a unique and authentic individual, an adventurous, ambitious, generous, productive, resourceful, serious, and spirited man of action.

Author's Query

The many photographs, documents, and newspaper accounts related to Dwight Church are valuable resource materials. However, personal accounts can give deeper insights into who Dwight Church was. If you or someone you know had direct contact with Dwight, and you are willing to share your information and stories with us, please contact either the St. Lawrence County Historical Association or Roger Bailey by email, baileyhaldane@msn.com.

End Notes

1. Robert Bogdan and Todd Weseloh, *Real Photo Postcard Guide: The People's Photography* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press) 186-206.
2. Bogdan and Weseloh 206.
3. L.M. Pierce has compiled a genealogical record of the Church Family, on line at <http://community.webshots.com>.
4. Lamar Bliss, interview conducted by Neal Burdick, 27 March, 1992. Several references listed below relate to interviews conducted by Neal Burdick in preparation for an article on Dwight Church titled "A Wing and a Prayer", written by Neal Burdick and published in the July/August, 1992, issue of *Adirondack Life*.

5. Dwight Church may or may not have known that Melville Dewey was very active in promoting simplified spelling systems. Dewey invented the Dewey Decimal Classification system and also developed the Lake Placid Club, a resort for social, cultural and spiritual enrichment in the Adirondack Mountains.

6. Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux) 70.

7. Aaron Scharf, *Art and Photography* (London: Penguin Books) offers a general survey of art influenced by photography and photography influenced by art.

8. Bogdan and Weseloh devote chapter five of *Real Photo Postcard Guide* to "Collecting Categories: Nomenclature for Collectors."

9. A *Commercial Advertiser* news item, dated October 5, 1926, describes a dinner at the Hotel Harrington, hosted by Owen D. Young, following a St. Lawrence-Hamilton football game. "Moving pictures of football and baseball, of the alumni parade and other commencement activities, and campus scenes were shown by D.P. Church."

10. One of many websites with information and images related to the Kodak 3A Folding Pocket Camera is located at <http://www.camerapedia.org>.

11. Laura Cotton, Associate Curator at The Adirondack Museum in Blue Mountain Lake, NY, was very helpful in providing information and digital photographs of the No. 3-A Autographic Kodak Jr. camera donated to the Museum by Richard Church.

12. Andy Flynn has written a story featuring Dwight Church and the No. 3-A Kodak camera Richard Church donated to The Adirondack Museum. Flynn's story appeared in the November 21, 2008, issue of the *Adirondack Daily Enterprise*, Saranac Lake, and will be included in Flynn's latest book, *New York State's Mountain Heritage: Adirondack Attic*, Volume 6, due to be released in June, 2009.

13. Bob Church, personal interview, 23 Feb., 2009.

14. Richard Church, personal interview, 26 Feb., 2009.

15. Bogdan and Weseloh, chapter two, 31-55, includes a discussion of photographic tints as well as specific information about how to identify real photo postcards, captions, and other technical information.

16. Phil McMasters, interview conducted by Neal Burdick, 9 April, 1992.

17. Frank White, personal interview, 15 Nov., 2007.

18. Bonnie Bliss, personal interview, 9 Aug., 2007.

19. Bogdan and Weseloh, 33-36, discussion of various ways in which one might determine the approximate date a real photo postcard was produced.
20. During World War I, between November 2, 1917 and June 30, 1919 the cost of sending a postcard was increased to two cents. From April 15, 1925 to July 1, 1928, the price was again raised to two cents.
21. Dwight's Student Pilot's Permit included a physical description of the student pilot: "Age, 38; weight, 142; height, 6'; color of hair, brown; and color of eyes, grey."
22. Joseph P. Juptner, *U.S. Civil Aircraft*, vol. 3, (Fallbrook, Calif.: Aero Publishers, Inc.) 146, 147.
23. Gary Hyatt's website can be found at <http://dmairfield.org/airplanes/NC113K/>
24. Jack Smith, personal interview, 25 Nov., 2007.
25. Bonnie Bliss, personal letter, 1 Jan., 2008.
26. Frank and Beulah White, interview conducted by Neal Burdick, 9 April, 1992.
27. Phil McMasters, interview conducted by Neal Burdick, 9 April, 1992.
28. Dennis Church, personal email, 13 Nov. 2007.

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- Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux; New York, NY. 1977.

Photo Credits

- The Adirondack Museum; Blue Mountain Lake, NY: *Figure 14*.
- Cameraedia.Org. <http://w.camerapedia.org>: *Figure 13*.
- David Hornung, private postcard collection; Canton, NY: *Figures 5, 6, 10, 18, 20, 23, 25, and 30*.
- St. Lawrence County Historical Association; Canton, NY: *Figures 1, 3, 4, 9, 12, 19, 21, 22, 27, and 28*.
- St. Lawrence University, Owen D. Young Library Archives, *The Dwight Church Special Collection: Figures 2, 7, 8, 11, 16, 17, 24, 26, 29, 31, 32, 33, and 34*.

Beulah and Frank White, personal collection; Canton, NY: *Figure 15*.

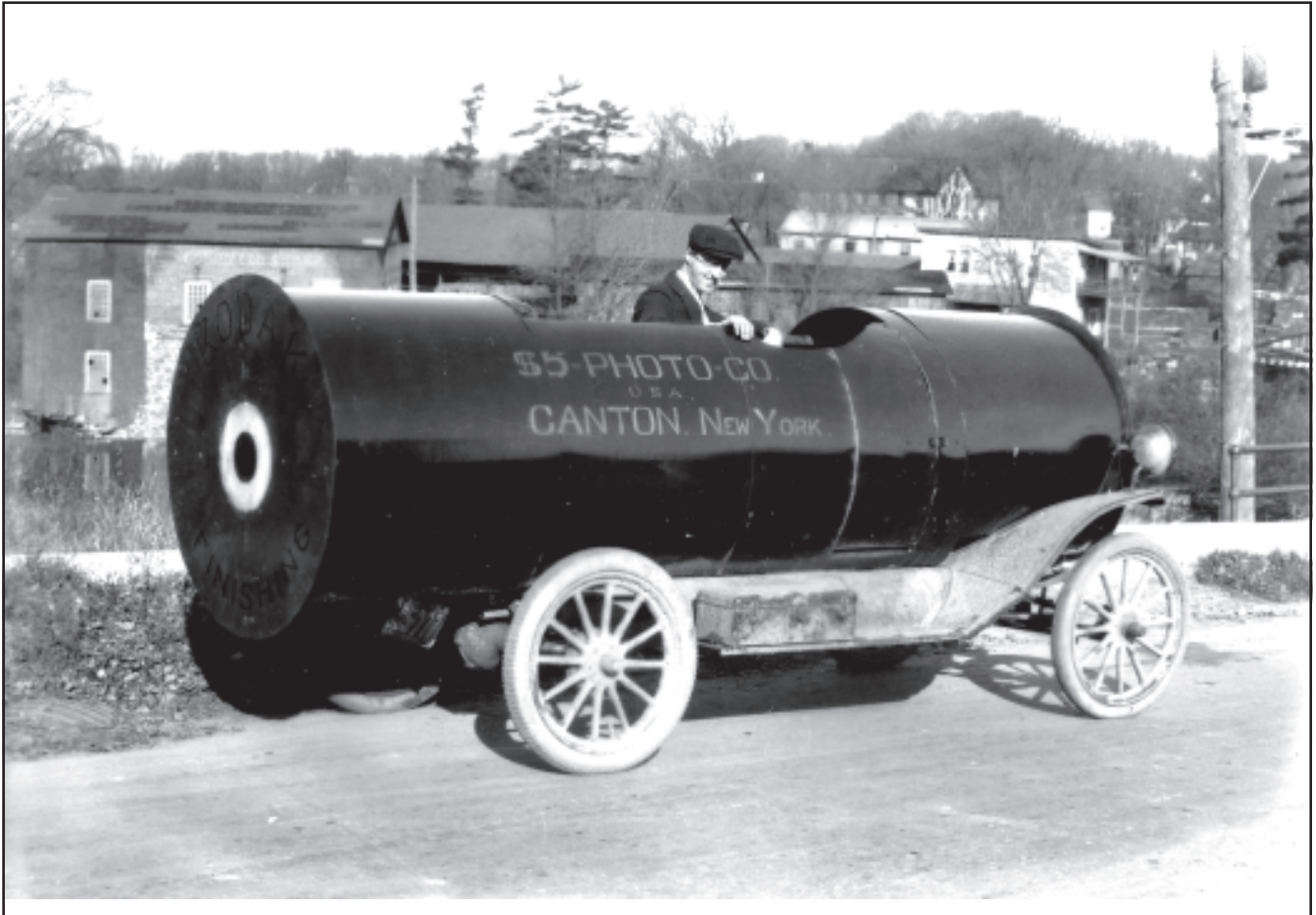
Acknowledgments

Dwight Church, thank you for your life's work. Bonnie Church Bliss and Lamar Bliss, thank you for preserving and organizing Dwight's negatives and photographs and papers and for your willingness to share those materials with us. The following people generously shared their knowledge, their collections, their stories, their skills, and their enthusiasm for Dwight Church: Neal Burdick, Pat Harrington Carson, Bob Church, Richard Church, Max Coots, Laura Cotton, Andy Flynn, David Hornung, Art Hurlbut, Darlene Leonard, Sue Longshore, JeanMarie Martello, David Martin, Anne Mazzotta, Mark McMurray, Susan and John Omohundro, Carol Pynchon, Jack Smith, Alan Teichman, Beulah and Frank White, and Mickey Williams. This research essay would not have been possible without the help of the people and institutions mentioned above. I also want to acknowledge two excellent search engines that enabled me to find many news items, feature stories, and advertisements related to Dwight Church. They are available at fultonhistory.com, hosted by Tom Tryniski and <http://news.nynyn.net/st-lawrence-county/search.html>, hosted by the Northern New York Library Network. To view other images of Dwight Church postcards of Canton, consult the St. Lawrence County Historical Quarterly, vol. LII, No. 2, 2007.

About the Author

Roger Bailey taught courses in drawing and printmaking in the Fine Arts Department at St. Lawrence University in Canton, NY, from 1969 to 2002. Following retirement, Bailey was involved in Grasse River Heritage projects from 2004 to 2008 and is currently on the Board of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association.

Mystery Photo



Dwight Church is shown here behind the wheel of his Film Spool Car, on Main Street in Canton, in the early 1920s. Falls Island and the Sherwin Grist Mill are in the background. "\$5 Photo Co., Canton, NY" is lettered on the side of the car and "Kodak Finishing" is on the rear of the vehicle. The car was most likely able to draw considerable attention to Dwight's photography business. The Dwight Church Photograph Collection, 1912-1974, in the ODY Library Special Collections at St. Lawrence University holds several photographic negatives of this car in Canton, NY, as well as other images showing the car in Daytona Beach, Florida. A Canton image reveals a New York commercial license plate number 972-238, dated 1921. An item in a file of Dwight Church's personal papers now in the archives of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association includes a note written by Dwight, which says he drove the Film Spool Car to Florida.

The mystery in this case involves trying to find answers to several questions: What ever happened to Dwight's Film Spool Car? Was it driven or shipped by rail to and/or from Florida? Where was it built? Is the Film Spool Car on the chassis of a 1915 Ford Runabout Dwight once owned? If you have any information that might help answer one or more of these questions, please email Roger Bailey at baileyhaldane@msn.com.



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